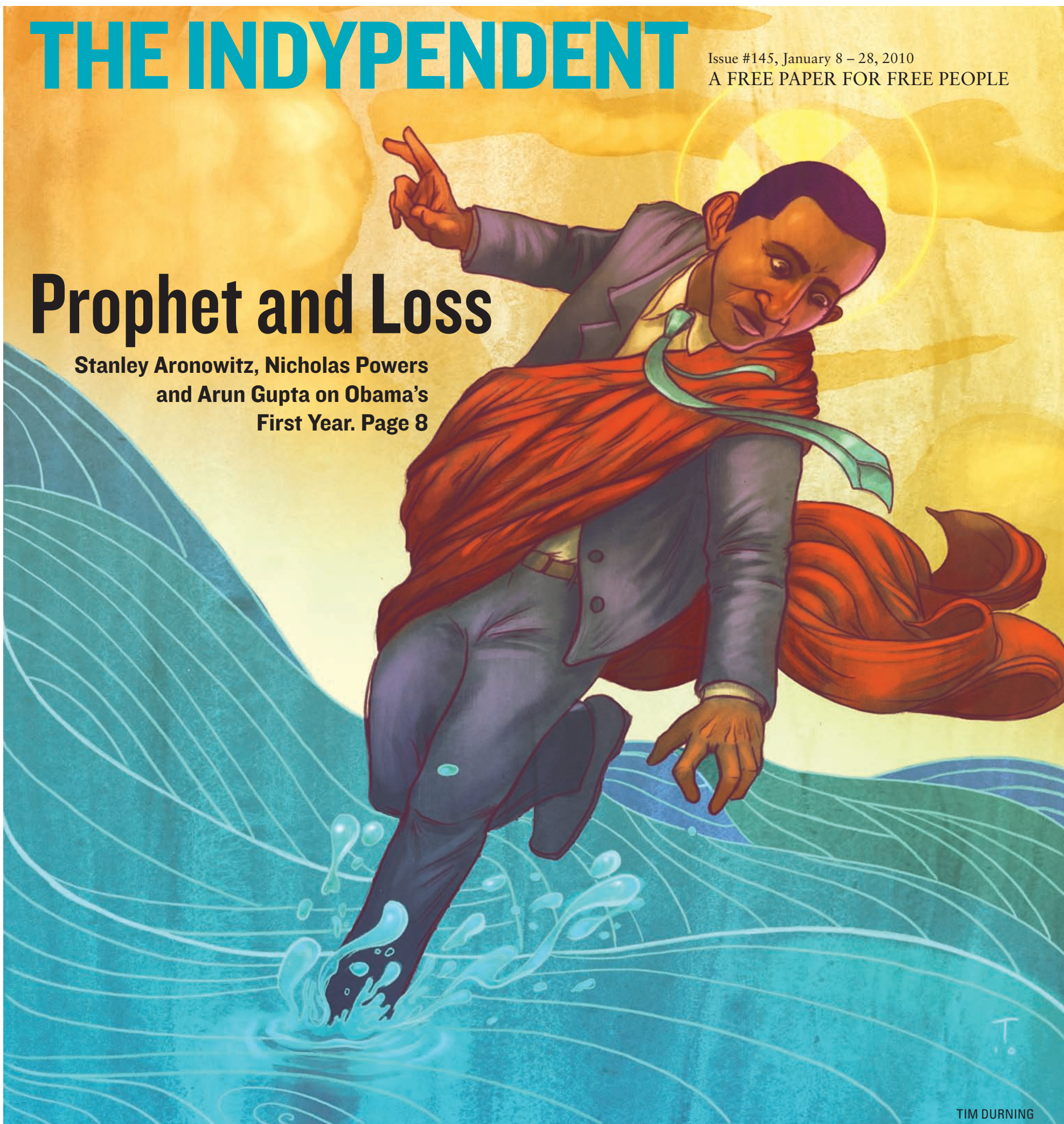


Prophet and Loss

Stanley Aronowitz, Nicholas Powers
and Arun Gupta on Obama's
First Year. Page 8

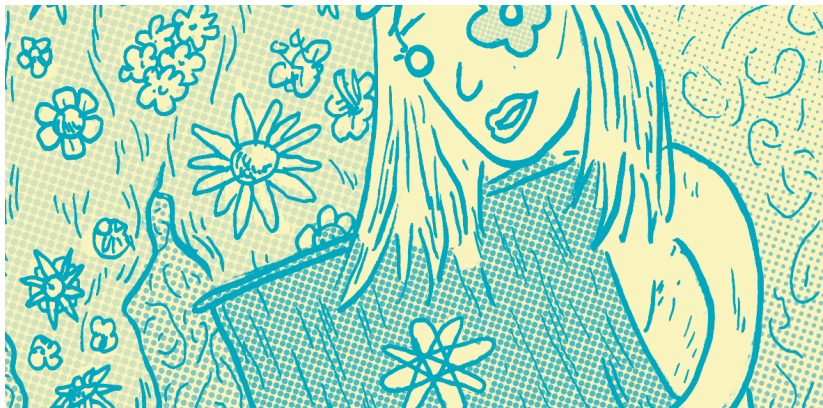


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THE INDEPENDENT
P.O. BOX 1417
NEW YORK, NY 10276

PHONE: 212-904-1282

GENERAL INQUIRIES AND SUBMISSIONS:

contact@indypendent.org

READER COMMENTS:

letters@indypendent.org

SUBSCRIPTIONS:

indypendent.org

VOLUNTEER:

volunteer@indypendent.org

DONATE ONLINE:

indypendent.org/donate

NEWS TIPS:

news@indypendent.org

ADVERTISING AND PROMOTION:

Arun Gupta: ak Gupta@indypendent.org

GENERAL COORDINATORS:

Jessica Lee, Elizabeth Henderson

ILLUSTRATIONS COORDINATOR:

Frank Reynoso: freynoso@indypendent.org

DESIGNERS:

Ryan Dunsmuir, Anna Gold

INDYKIDS:

indykids@indymedia.org

INDYVIDEO:

awolf@indypendent.org

PUBLISH YOUR NEWS:

nyc.indymedia.org

The Independent is a New York-based free newspaper published 17 times a year on Fridays to our print and online readership of more than 200,000. It is produced by a network of volunteers who report, write, edit, draw, design, take photos, distribute, fundraise and provide website management. Since 2000, more than 650 citizen journalists, artists and media activists have participated in this project. Winner of more than 50 New York Community Media Alliance awards, *The Independent* is dedicated to empowering people to create a true alternative to the corporate press by encouraging people to produce their own media. *The Independent* is funded by subscriptions, donations, grants, merchandise sales, benefits and advertising from organizations with similar missions. We accept submissions that look at news and culture through a critical lens, exploring how systems of power — economic, political and social — affect the lives of people locally and globally. *The Independent* reserves the right to edit articles for length, content and clarity.

The Independent is the newspaper project of the New York City Independent Media Center, which is affiliated with the global Indymedia movement (indymedia.org), an international network that is dedicated to fostering grassroots media production. NYC IMC sponsors three other volunteer projects: the children's newspaper *IndyKids*, the IndyVideo news team and the NYC IMC open publishing website (nyc.indymedia.org).

VOLUNTEER CONTRIBUTORS:

Sam Alcott, Steven Arnerich, Pat Aulisio, Mark Bailey, Bennett Baumer, Mike Burke, Ellen Davidson, Tim Durning, Renée Feltz, Seth Fisher, Leo Garcia, Alan Good, Samantha Gorelick, Mary Heglar, Andrew Hinderaker, Alex Kane, Ruth Kelton, Amy Kraft, Jaisal Noor, Judith Mahoney Pasternak, Brian Ponto, Nicholas Powers, Keren Sadan, Ann Schneider, Sarah Secunda, John Tarleton, Eric Volpe, Steven Wishnia and Amy Wolf.

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TUE JAN 12

6-7pm • Free

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WED JAN 13

7pm • Free, Donations encouraged

DISCUSSION: NAOMI KLEIN & RAJ PATEL. *Democracy Now!* host Amy Goodman will moderate a discussion with Naomi Klein and Raj Patel on how to work for change in the current political and economic climate. Co-sponsored by Picador Books, New York Society for Ethical Culture, *The Nation* and *The Independent*.

New York Society for Ethical Culture
2 W 64th St
212-874-5210 • nysec.org

FRI JAN 15

All Day • Free

DEADLINE: recipe contest. Submit plant-based recipes for NYC schools to the NY Coalition for Healthy School Food. 607-272-1154 • healthyschoolfood.org

SAT JAN 16

10am-4pm • Free

RECYCLING: E-WASTE RECYCLING DAY. The Lower East Side Ecology Center will hold an electronics recycling day. Drop off computers, printers, televisions, cell phones and more.

Tekserve, 119 W 23rd St
212-477-4022 • lesecologycenter.org

3-7pm • \$40 adv/\$45 door

FUNDRAISER: TRIBUTE TO THE FAMILIES OF POLITICAL PRISONERS AND PRISONERS OF WAR. The Malcolm X Commemoration Committee and 1199 SEIU Activists will host this commemorative dinner. Martin Luther King Jr. Labor Center 310 W 43rd St 718-512-5008 • mxcc519@verizon.net

SUN JAN 17

2pm • \$6/\$10/\$15

MEMORIAL: DENNIS BRUTUS (1924-2009). Join us to honor the South African poet, anti-apartheid fighter and human rights activist. Sponsored by Haymarket Books, Activist Poets's Roundtable, War Resisters League and the Brecht Forum. Brecht Forum, 451 West St 212-242-4201 • brechtforum.org

reader comments

Post your own comments online at the end of each article at indypendent.org or email letters@indypendent.org.

FAILING TO SHELTER

Response to "Message to Homeless: Pay to Stay," Dec. 11:

"Shame" is all one can say. The city should have a little bit of honesty, and not call it a "homeless shelter," while it is a rental accommodation. —HARBANS SINGH

A CRY FOR HELP

Response to "One Student's Question to the World: 'Why the Palestinians? Why Are We the Only Ones Suffering?'" *IndyBlog* Jan. 1:

For almost the last three years, Israel has subjected Gaza to an illegal economic siege, which in itself constitutes a crime against humanity. Israel had, and still is, preventing the entry into Gaza of vital life and sus-



INDYPENDENT FUNDRAISER AND GAZA REPORT BACK. SUN, JAN 17 BRECHT FORUM: Participants in the December 2009 Gaza Freedom March protest in Cairo, Egypt, for the right to enter the Gaza Strip. The majority of solidarity activists were not allowed to cross the border. PHOTO: ELLEN DAVIDSON

5-7PM • \$10/\$20 door

INDYPENDENT FUNDRAISER. Meet Remi Kanazi, editor of *Poets for Palestine*, and *Independent* journalists returning from Gaza, who will discuss the current situation in Palestine. Hors d'oeuvres and cash bar.

Brecht Forum, 451 West St
212-904-1282 • indypendent.org

MON JAN 18

7pm • Free

READING: KAHLIL ALMUSTAFA FROM AUCTION BLOCK TO OVAL OFFICE.

On the one-year anniversary of Obama's inauguration, Kahlil Almustafa reads poetry and provides a critical dialogue exploring the hopes, fears, and contradictions attendant to the election of an African-American president. Bluestockings, 172 Allen St 212-777-6028 • bluestockings.com

WED JAN 20

10-11:30am • Free

BRIEFING: RESIDENT PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC HOUSING. Organizers, resident leaders and policy experts will offer their perspectives on resident participation in public housing. RSVP by Jan. 14. North Star Fund 520 8th St, 22nd Fl, Ste 2203 212-860-6001 x22 • vincent@cvhaction.org

THU JAN 21

4-6:30PM • FREE

RALLY: PROTEST BLOOMBERG'S EDUCATION POLICY. Come join and support the students, parents and teachers of the 22 school communities affected by the proposed closings and charter takeovers. Rally located in front of Mayor Michael Bloomberg's home. 17 East 79th St 718-601-4901 • gemnyc@gmail.com grassrootseducationmovement.blogspot.com

FRI JAN 22

APPLICATION DEADLINE: SPRING REPORTING INTERNSHIP PROGRAM. *The Independent* is accepting applications for its Spring Reporting Internship that starts Feb. 1. For more information, visit indypendent.org.

SUN JAN 24

7pm • Free

READING: VENEZUELA SPEAKS! The editors of this collection of interviews with Venezuelan activists, land reformers and organizers will discuss grassroots movements in Venezuela. Bluestockings, 172 Allen St 212-777-6028 • bluestockings.com

THU JAN 28

12:30-2pm • Free



EDUCATION CRISIS

Responses to "NYC School Closings Draw Heated Protests on a Bitterly Cold Day," *IndyBlog*, Dec. 30: Mayor Bloomberg is working

LECTURE: THE MIDDLE EAST IN A MULTI-POLAR WORLD. The Middle East Institute will present this lecture by Dilip Hiro on the relationships between the Middle East and the emerging world powers of China, the European Union and Russia. Columbia University, Knox Hall, Rm 208 606 W 122 St sipa.columbia.edu

FRI JAN 29

7:30 pm • \$15 adv/\$20 door

CONCERT: IN HONOR OF THE PEOPLES' VOICE CAFÉ. Lavender Light Gospel Choir and emma's revolution will headline a concert to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Peoples' Voice Café and to benefit the People's Music Network. For tickets and a full lineup, visit pmnyc.home.att.net/concert.html. New York Society for Ethical Culture 2 W 64th St 212-874-5210 • nysec.org

SAT FEB 6

1-5:30pm • \$10-\$30 Sliding Scale WORKSHOP: INTRODUCTION TO JOURNALISM. *Independent* editors will cover the basics of media criticism, news writing, interviewing, research and ethics. RSVP required. For more information and to get an application, email us at indyreporting@gmail.com. 212-904-1282 • indypendent.org

his butt off to make sure poor kids get a chance at a good education and these protesters are slamming him for doing that and calling his reforms racist. That's crazy!

—A PROUD LIBERAL

Mayor Bloomberg and New York City School Chancellor Joe Klein set up schools to fail and then proclaim themselves to be saviors when they finish off these schools and hand over the buildings to their charter school cronies. It's the classic right-wing strategy of defunding the public sector as a prelude to privatization. It's amazing how many people fall for this bait-and-switch.

—NOT SO

HAND 'EM OVER!

Court Order on Secret RNC Spy Docs Raises Questions about NYPD Intel Unit

BY LEONARD LEVITT

For yet a third time, a federal judge has ordered the NYPD to release 2,000 pages of secret documents, showing how it spied on groups planning legal protests at the 2004 Republican National Convention (RNC) at Madison Square Garden.

On Dec. 14, District Judge Richard Sullivan affirmed a 2008 order by Federal Magistrate James Francis, IV that the NYPD's Intelligence Division turn over the documents.

But will Police Commissioner Ray Kelly and his newly appointed \$165,000 special counsel, Katherine Ann Lemire, formerly of the U.S. Attorney's office, find another legal dodge to avoid doing so?

In short, will Kelly and Deputy Commissioner for Intelligence David Cohen abandon their "secret documents defense," and therefore lose their case against the protesters so that New Yorkers will never see those secret files?

In court papers known as the "Cohen Declaration," Cohen had argued that releasing even redacted secret documents would compromise the department and harm the fight against terrorism.

A more cynical interpretation would be that releasing the documents would embarrass him and Kelly, revealing that the Intelligence Division's spying might not only have been inept and misguided, but illegal.

In an apparent last minute decision on the eve of discovery on Dec. 12, 2006, after two years of litigation, the police department had cited this spying to justify the arrests of 1,806 protesters at the RNC.

That decision, by police department and city lawyers, led to the revelation of the Intelligence Division's secret spying. Until then, no one outside the NYPD knew of it.

The New York Civil Liberties Union (NYCLU) had questioned whether many of those protesters had been illegally detained.

The department maintained that the protesters' arrests and detentions stemmed from what Intelligence Division detectives had learned from their spying. But when the NYCLU asked exactly what Intel had learned, and sought to see the documents, Kelly and Cohen refused to reveal them.

The spying became public knowledge in March 2007, when Jim Dwyer of *The New York Times* revealed that Intel detectives travelled to cities across this country, and to Canada and Europe to secretly monitor people who planned to protest at the RNC.

"In hundreds of reports stamped 'N.Y.P.D. Secret,' the Intelligence Division chronicled the views and plans of people who had no apparent intention of breaking the law, the records show," the *Times* reported.

Now let's step back and examine how all this might have come about.

ABUSE OF POWER

This apparent abuse of power began with Commissioner Kelly's response to the horror of the 9/11 attacks, when he expanded the department's long dormant Intelligence Division under Cohen, a 35-year veteran of the CIA.

Noting that the FBI had failed to protect the city before 9/11, Kelly stated in 2002, "We feel we have to protect ourselves."

Thus began Kelly's and Cohen's revamped Intelligence Division, which created, in the words of a number of law enforcement officials, a mini-CIA — but without safeguards to ensure it didn't break the law and become, in the words of a terrorism expert with whom the NYPD has consulted, "a rogue entity."

In February 2003, after police arrested 274 people who demonstrated against the Iraq war, Intelligence Division detectives questioned the protesters in their cells, demanding to know the names of their friends and political affiliations, what schools they had attended, what organizations they belonged to, what they thought of Israel and Palestine, and where they had been on 9/11.

Federal Judge Charles Haight reprimanded Kelly, who promised that such questioning would end.

In the fall of 2003, Kelly and Cohen began sending Intel detectives on secret forays out-of-state, where the

NYPD lacks jurisdiction, without informing the FBI or local authorities.

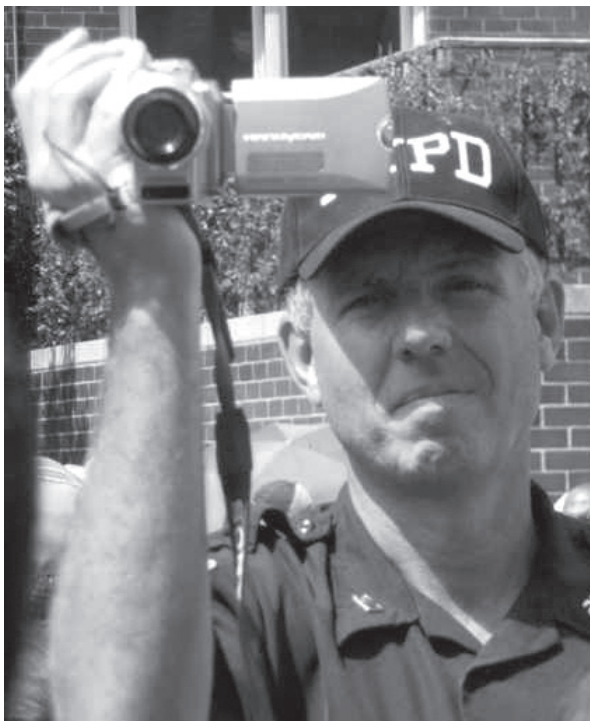
On the Jersey shore, Intel detectives conducted a sting of scuba shops before local authorities asked them to leave New Jersey.

In the town of Carlisle, in western Pennsylvania, they investigated the theft of explosives before the local police chief asked them to return to New York.

In Boston, Intel detectives infiltrated a church meeting of a protest group called the Black Tea Society, and then were nearly arrested for speeding after initially refusing to identify themselves to Massachusetts state police.

Meanwhile, Kelly and Cohen based Intelligence Division detectives overseas to rival the FBI. Perhaps their most notable achievement was succeeding in being faster than the Bureau to interview the Spanish National Police after the 2004 Madrid train bombing.

At Cohen's direction in the fall of 2007, Intel detec-



CONSTANT SURVEILLANCE: The NYPD in action during the 2004 Republican National Convention. The department was also quite busy before the convention.

PHOTO: BLOG.DENNISFOX.NET

tives delayed the Iranian delegation to the United Nations at Kennedy airport for 40 minutes by searching them for weapons — violating diplomatic protocol, and disregarding protests from officials of the State Department, Secret Service and the Port Authority police.

In the fall of 2008, Kelly complained to Attorney General Michael Mukasey that the federal government needlessly delayed the NYPD's eavesdropping applications because of legal concerns. Mukasey responded that Kelly was acting "contrary to the law."

Last September, the Intelligence Division disrupted an FBI investigation into perhaps the most serious terrorism threat to New Yorkers since 9/11. Apparently without informing the Bureau, which had been tracking terrorism suspect Najibullah Zazi, Intel detectives showed his photo to one of their informants, a Queens imam, who tipped off Zazi. The Bureau was forced to arrest Zazi and the imam before learning the extent of the plot.

Back in 2008, the *Times* also reported that the city had spent \$8.2 million in settlement costs and legal fees growing out of Intel's RNC spying. Whether or not the police department releases the secret spying documents or settles with the protesters, that cost is going to grow.

Leonard Levitt wrote the column One Police Plaza for Newsday about the New York City Police Department from 1995 to 2005. He is the author of NYPD Confidential: Power and Corruption in the Country's Greatest Police Force (Thomas Dunne Books, 2009). This article originally appeared at nypdconfidential.com.



AT RISK: A Jamaica (Queens) High School student speaks at a Dec. 16 rally against her school's closing. PHOTO: Angel Gonzalez, GEM-NYC

Bloomberg School Closings Draw Ire

BY JOHN TARLETON

Parents, educators and community activists are mobilizing to save 21 public schools, including 16 high schools, that the New York City Department of Education (DOE) has announced it will begin to phase out in 2010.

"They dropped a bomb on the schools without any notice," said William McDonald, a Queens parent and a leader of the Save Our Schools Coalition, a group that opposes the school closings. "The principals didn't know. The teachers didn't know. The parents didn't know."

Public hearings are being held at each of the affected schools this month in advance of a Jan. 26 meeting of the city's school board where a final decision will be made. Organizers with the Grassroots Education Movement are also calling for a demonstration outside of Mayor Bloomberg's Upper East Side mansion on Jan. 21.

The DOE says the schools are being closed because they were underperforming. Under the Department's plan, the schools won't accept any more new students and will be shut completely once the current students graduate.

Critics of the closings say that the affected schools enroll a disproportionate number of special needs students while receiving fewer resources per student than private charter schools favored by Mayor Michael Bloomberg and DOE Chancellor Joel Klein. They also note that the closings primarily target schools in communities of color.

"They don't play the same game with every community," said Vanessa Sparks, a former member of the District 28 Community Education Council in central Queens, referring to Bloomberg and Klein.

The Jan. 26 meeting of the Panel on Education Policy, which replaced the old city school board in 2002, will be held at Brooklyn Tech High School in Fort Greene. Opponents of the school closings face an uphill battle as Bloomberg appoints seven of the Board's 12 voting members. Still, opponents of the school closings say they are not giving up.

"Jan. 26 will be ground zero in this fight," McDonald said.

For more see grassrootseducationmovement.blogspot.com.

SCHOOL CLOSING HEARINGS AND RELATED EVENTS:

11 JAN • 6PM	NORMAN THOMAS HS 111 E. 33rd St., Manhattan
11 JAN • 6PM	KAPPA II MS 144-176 E. 128th St., Manhattan
11 JAN • 6PM	ALFRED E. SMITH HS 333 E. 151st, Bronx
12 JAN • 6PM	WILLIAM H. MAXWELL VOCATIONAL HS 145 Pennsylvania Ave., Brooklyn
12 JAN • 6PM	BUSINESS, COMPUTER APPLICATIONS AND ENTREPRENEUR HS 207-01 116th Ave., Queens
13 JAN • 6PM	ACADEMY OF COLLABORATIVE EDUCATION MS 222 W. 134th St., Manhattan
13 JAN • 6PM	PS 332 51 Christopher Ave., Brooklyn
13 JAN • 6PM	MIDDLE SCHOOL FOR ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL EXCELLENCE 1224 Park Pl., Brooklyn
14 JAN • 6PM	NEW DAY ACADEMY HS 800 Home St., Bronx
14 JAN • 6PM	METROPOLITAN CORPORATE ACADEMY HS 362 Schermerhorn St., Brooklyn
19 JAN • 6PM	MONROE ACADEMY OF BUSINESS LAW HS 1300 Boynton Ave., Bronx
21 JAN • 4-6:30 PM	PROTEST OUTSIDE OF MAYOR BLOOMBERG'S home 17 E. 79th St., Mahnattan
26 JAN • 6PM	PEP MEETING AT BROOKLYN TECH HIGH SCHOOL 29 Fort Greene Pl., Brooklyn

Recipe for Change:

FOOD GROUPS READY TO REMAKE SCHOOL MEALS PROGRAM

By Nancy Romer

When Barack Obama’s daughters began class at a private school in Washington, D.C., last January, the media breathlessly reported the first week’s lunch menu: roasted local veggie melts, organic spinach salad, organic black bean nachos, chicken fajitas, French dip au jus, pineapple gratin, and more.

Such a feast would be out of reach for students in the New York City public school system, which serves about 860,000 meals per day, mostly pre-cooked food with limited nutritional value due to inadequate resources and outmoded guidelines supplied by the federal government. But now, we have the chance to make sure all schoolchildren eat healthily, as Congress prepares to reauthorize child nutrition legislation setting government policy through 2015.

The federal government currently spends \$11 billion per year on school meals for more than 31 million students every day, 17.5 million of them from low-income families. Annually, school food programs— breakfast and lunch combined — serve over seven billion meals and are a rich source of buying power.

A vibrant, growing school food movement is looking to shift that government money away from absorbing agribusiness’s overproduction of genetically modified soy, wheat and corn and hormone- and anti-biotic-laden beef and pork. The preferences would shift to tapping local agriculture and providing more veggies and fruits, with less reliance on fatty and processed foods.

School food activists are also working to remove the stigma that deters poor children from participating by making school food free for all and including it as part of the regular school day. It would cost about \$12 billion to \$16 billion more each year to create a free, nutritious breakfast and lunch program in the United States according to Janet Poppendieck, author of *Free For All: Fixing School Food in America*. This, co-incidentally, is projected to be the monthly cost of war in Iraq and Afghanistan.

both school nutrition and the supplemental assistance for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) programs later this winter or early spring, corporate “Big Food” will deploy all its power to shape legislation to its liking. (See Child Nutrition Promotion and School Lunch Protection Act sets rules and funding levels for the major school-based nutrition programs, including the School Lunch, School Breakfast and the Summer Food Service Programs, as well as WIC from 2010-2015.

This time, however, agribusiness-as-usual will face an energized movement that includes anti-hunger and poverty groups as well as groups addressing health and environmental issues. New York has the nation’s largest school district and dozens of local food justice organizations have formed the New York City Alliance for Child Nutrition Reauthorization to push local members of Congress to do the right thing.



PHOTO: Courtesy of Fresh Fruit & Vegetable Snack Program, Ithaca, NY. New York Coalition for Healthy School Food, healthyschoolfood.org.

NYC Teachers + Food Activism = Healthy Meals

Local food activists are also looking to make direct change here in New York City. The Brooklyn Food Coalition (BFC), which is active in 10 Brooklyn neighborhoods, is working with City Harvest to change school food policies. While arcane federal regulations, especially paltry funding formulas, limit the branch of the city’s Department of Education that handles school meals, many positive local changes are possible even within the old framework.

The BFC is also working with the teachers union’s Green Schools Committee, with more than 5,000 members, who want to see their students get the food they need to be ready to learn and grow in their classes. We are planning an all-out organizing effort to hear from parents and teachers about their priorities and to set school-based and city-wide agendas for change. We are aiming toward a late March/early April training session for parents and teachers that will coordinate a mobilization around transforming school food. Join us: brooklynfoodcoalition.org/group/schoollunchreform.

—N.R.

SURPLUS COMMODITIES

School meal programs were established in 1935 as a way for the federal government to purchase surplus farm commodities. Over time, educators and anti-hunger advocates added a new framework: children cannot learn well if they are hungry.

Providing more nutritious meals at school can also have a big impact on kids’ overall health. Research has shown that if kids are introduced to food through the curriculum — growing and cooking food themselves, studying food systems — they are much more likely to eat more vegetables and to lay off the fat, sugar, salt and junk food. With growing epidemics of diabetes and obesity among kids, inaction should no longer be considered acceptable.

Overhauling the school meals program can also have a big impact on the health of our planet: Our bloated corporate food system, replete with oil-based pesticides, fertilizers, heavy farm equipment, long-distance transportation and factory animal farming, is responsible for 15 to 37 percent of U.S. greenhouse gas emissions, according to various estimates.

PRESSURING NY POLS

In particular, the alliance will be targeting Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), who sits on the U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry, and Chuck Schumer (D-NY), who works on the Senate Finance and Joint Economic Committees. It will also be pressing Rep. Charles Rangel (D-NY), who chairs the U.S. House Committee on Ways and Means, and Rep. Yvette Clarke (D-NY), who sits on the Committee on Education and Labor and Committee on Small Business, to stand up for our school children.

President Obama has pledged to end childhood hunger in the United States, and First Lady Michelle Obama has been an outspoken advocate of healthy, locally grown food. However, it is unlikely that President Obama will buck the agribusiness and “Big Food” corporations or press Congress to allocate the extra funds needed to make the school meals programs healthy, nutritious and universal unless we act. As with so many other progressive causes, our ultimate success depends less on what Obama is willing to do and more on what we do to make it happen. Time to step up to the plate!

Nancy Romer is the general coordinator for the Brooklyn Food Coalition (brooklynfood-coalition.org). For more information on the New York City Alliance for Child Nutrition Reauthorization see nycforcnr.org.

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	Bluestockings 172 Allen St. Housing Works 126 Crosby St. ABC No Rio 156 Rivington St. Zerya Turkish Food 178 East 7th St. Mercer St. Books 206 Mercer St. New York Public Library Jefferson Market Branch Sixth Ave. & 9th St.	4th Street Food Co-op 58 E. 4th St. Theater for the New City 155 First Ave. 14TH TO 96TH ST. Manhattan Neighborhood Network 537 W. 59th St. Housing Conservation Coordinators 777 Tenth Ave. Domus 413 W. 44th St.	ABOVE 96TH ST. New York Public Library Morningside Branch 114th St. & Broadway New York Public Library Harlem Branch Library 9 W. 124th St. New York Public Library George Bruce Branch 518 W. 125th St. New York Public Library Countee Cullen Branch 104 W. 136th St.	BROOKLYN Brooklyn Museum 200 Eastern Pkwy. BAM 30 Lafayette Ave. Vox Pop 1022 Cortelyou Rd. Tillie's of Brooklyn 248 DeKalb Ave. Tea Lounge Union St. & Seventh Ave. Video Gallery 310 Seventh Ave.	Verb Café Bedford Ave. & N. 5th St. Videology 308 Bedford Ave. Pillow Café 505 Myrtle Ave. Sisters Community Hardware 900 Fulton St. Brooklyn Library Pacific St. Branch Pacific St. Library 25 Fourth Ave.	Blackbird Café 197 Bedford Ave. Outpost Café 1014 Fulton St. 'sNice Café 315 Fifth Ave. Brooklyn Public Library Pacific Branch 561 Pacific St. Brooklyn Public Library Bedford Branch 496 Franklin St.	Mothers on the Move 928 Intervale St. South Bronx Food Co-Op 3103 Third Ave. at 158th St. Bronx Museum of the Arts 1040 Grand Concourse	

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VICTORY IN THE BRONX

Community Insists on Living Wage Jobs

By DIANE KRAUTHAMER

Members of the Kingsbridge Armory Redevelopment Alliance (KARA) watched in hushed suspense from the visitors gallery above the City Council chamber on Dec. 14.

After four years of building a grassroots movement to advocate responsible development in their community, they looked on as councilmembers voted on Mayor Michael Bloomberg's plans to turn the Kingsbridge Armory, a 575,000-square-foot fortress-like structure in the northwest Bronx, into a low-wage shopping mall. When Council Majority Leader Joel Rivera (D-Bronx) finally announced the project's defeat by a vote of 45-1, cheers rang throughout the chambers.

"This is a historic moment in the City Council," said councilmember Charles Barron (D-Brooklyn). "I can't remember any big project like this that the mayor initially

Approximately 44 percent of retail workers in New York City make less than \$10 per hour, according to the Fiscal Policy Institute.

Days before the vote, Bronx councilmembers tried to strike a deal with the Bloomberg administration but the mayor scuttled negotiations, giving the council no choice but to kill the project.

"Our billionaire mayor pulled the plug on the armory because he is against a living wage for workers, even though this project was to receive tremendous subsidies," said Desiree Pilgrim-Hunter, KARA leader and executive board member of the NWBCCC.

KARA utilized a variety of tools to leverage the political establishment into opposing Bloomberg's plan to redevelop the armory, including an independent traffic study that highlighted how the high volume of traffic to the mall would result in increased congestion and pollution in the surrounding communities. Councilmember Joel Rivera cited



WHOSE ARMORY? Northwest Bronx residents rally outside the Kingsbridge Armory in October. PHOTO: CHARLES FOSTROM/RWDSU

wanted, that the council would go against in support of the people."

Still, the mood was bittersweet. Though the vote marks a shift in the political landscape as Bloomberg begins his third term, this was not quite the victory that KARA and the City Council wanted.

KARA, an alliance of Bronx residents, churches and labor unions, was formed in 2005 after the Bloomberg administration launched its redevelopment plan for the armory. By 2009, KARA included 19 organizations led by the Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition (NWBCCC) and the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union. It garnered support from dozens of elected leaders, including the entire Bronx City Council delegation.

KARA was clear with the Bloomberg administration about the community's vision: a binding community benefits agreement that included a mixed-use development with recreation and community space; schools on the surrounding property; union construction jobs with apprenticeship opportunities for Bronx residents; and for-profit businesses that pay workers a living wage of \$10 an hour with benefits and respect for their right to organize a union.

This seemed like a reasonable request as the project's lead developer, the Related Companies, was slated to receive more than \$60 million in taxpayer subsidies for the \$310 million project. Related claims it could not ask future tenants to pay the 1,200 or so retail workers in the proposed "Shops at the Armory" more than the minimum wage of \$7.25 per hour.

the findings from this report as one reason he voted against the project. Additionally, KARA encouraged its members to call and write letters to their councilmembers, urging them not to approve the proposed project unless Related agreed to sign a community benefits agreement.

The battle over the armory could catalyze a new living wage movement. On Dec. 20, labor and community activists protested outside the Queens Center Mall in Elmhurst. They demanded that the mall's parent company, Macerich, require tenants to pay a living wage, allow retail workers to join a union without intimidation from their employer and provide more space to community functions. Most of the 3,100 retail workers in the mall are paid around the minimum wage despite \$48 million in tax abatements Macerich received since 2004.

The next step in requiring retailers to pay living wages at projects that receive public subsidies is an ordinance proposed by Bronx Councilmembers Annabel Palma and G. Oliver Koppell. John Petro, urban policy analyst at the Drum Major Institute for Public Policy, said that, if passed, this ordinance "would completely change the way the city handles economic subsidy deals. It sends a clear message to companies that pay their employees poverty-level wages: If you want to benefit from public subsidies, you will have to pay a living wage."

Diane Krauthamer is a communications assistant at the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union.

The Park Slope Farmers Market joins The (Makers) Market

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Facing 70 Years in Prison for Clothing

By SAM ALCOFF

For almost three years Syed Fahad Hashmi, 29, has been held in solitary confinement at the Metropolitan Correctional Center in lower Manhattan.

Though he has yet to be convicted of any crime, Hashmi is the first person to be extradited to the United States from Britain to face charges of terrorism.

Hashmi moved to London in 2004 to earn a master's degree in international relations at London Metropolitan University. While living there, the U.S. government alleges he knowingly allowed an acquaintance, Junaid Babar, to store waterproof socks and raincoats in Hashmi's apartment for a couple of weeks. The U.S. government claims that Babar then delivered these supplies to Al Qaeda operatives in Afghanistan.

Hashmi was arrested in London in June

2006 based on Babar's testimony to a U.S. grand jury. If convicted, he could face up to 70 years in prison.

Still awaiting trial, Hashmi is subjected to the government's Special Administrative Measures (SAMs), restrictive rules usually reserved for mafia kingpins still able to organize criminal activity from behind prison walls. He has been in jail since his arrest and was extradited to the United States in 2007. Supporters say Hashmi is being held in conditions that violate the Eighth Amendment's prohibition of "cruel and unusual punishment."

A practicing Muslim, Hashmi is not allowed to attend group prayer and is subjected to 24-hour electronic monitoring. He is only permitted to write one letter to a single family member each week, using only three pieces of paper.

These types of restrictive conditions have

become common under the "war on terror," but Hashmi's case indicates a new level of severity.

Hashmi's trial is expected to begin in federal court early this year, but it has been postponed at least once. At trial, observers expect prosecutors to withhold evidence, and the government's indictment signals that it intends to bring his political beliefs up at trial.

The community of support that has risen up around Hashmi's case includes his teachers, the Center for Constitutional Rights and the New York theater community. They have been holding weekly vigils for months and are demanding that the SAMs be dropped.

Prior to his arrest, activism played a significant role in Hashmi's life, and he was deeply committed to Muslim and antiwar causes.

His brother, Faisal Hashmi, calls the charges "ridiculous."

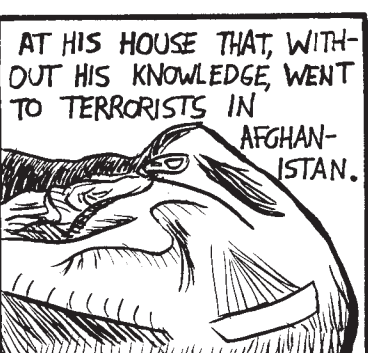
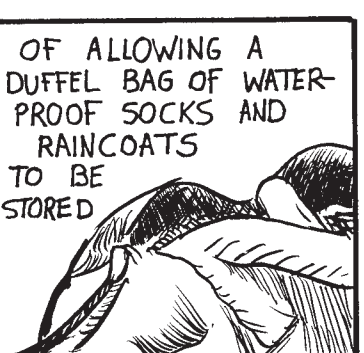
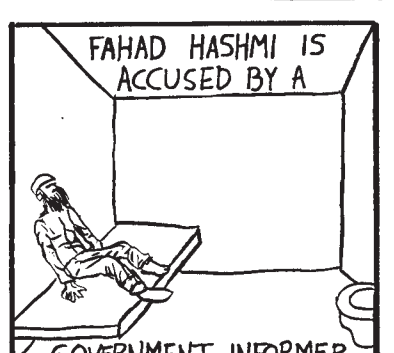
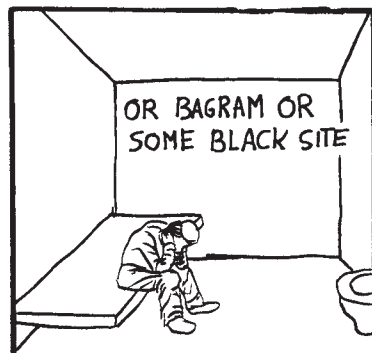
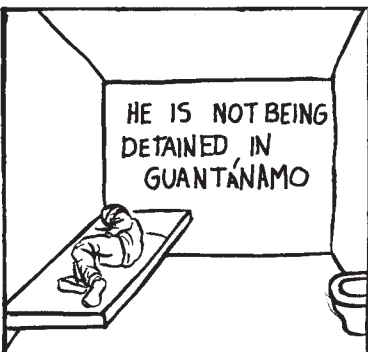
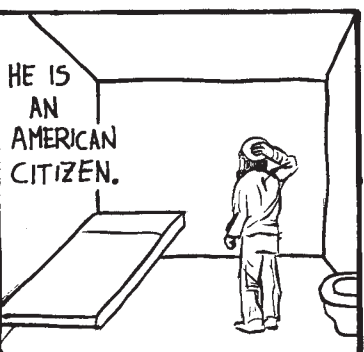
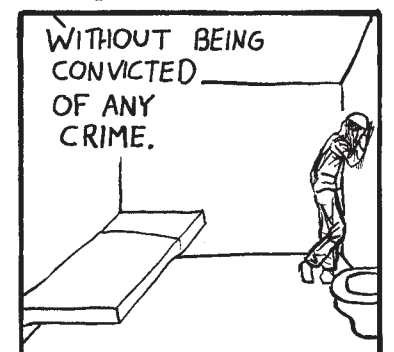
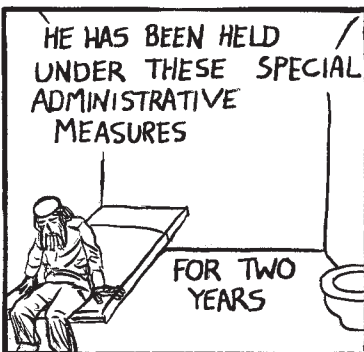
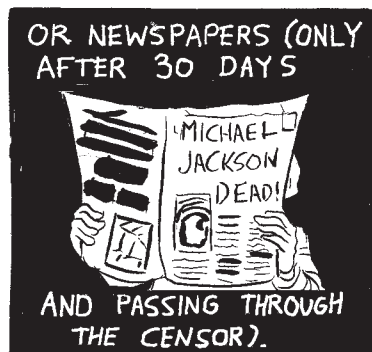
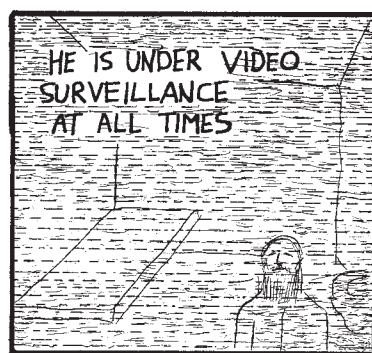
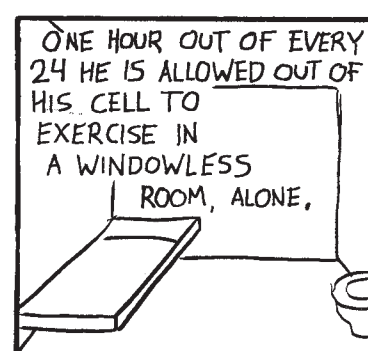
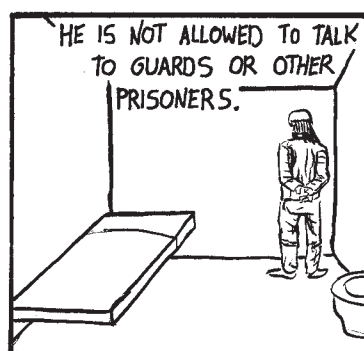
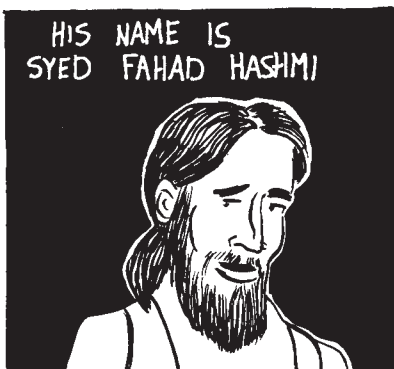
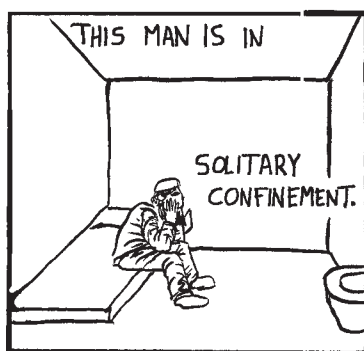
"He was an activist for the Muslim cause. He was active against the war, and against the embargo on Iraq earlier than that. He was a well-known activist in the Muslim community," Faisal said.

Remi Kanazi, a prominent Palestinian-American poet and participant in the weekly vigils, is concerned that the disregard for human rights that characterized the Bush era is being repeated.

"Unfortunately, the worst aspects of the Bush years continue under Obama. As activists, we continue to demand the change that is necessary: the restitution of civil liberties and equal rights for all citizens," Kanazi said.

For information about upcoming vigils, go to thawaction.org. To find out more about Fahad's trial, visit freefahad.com.

NYC GITMO by Ethan Heitner





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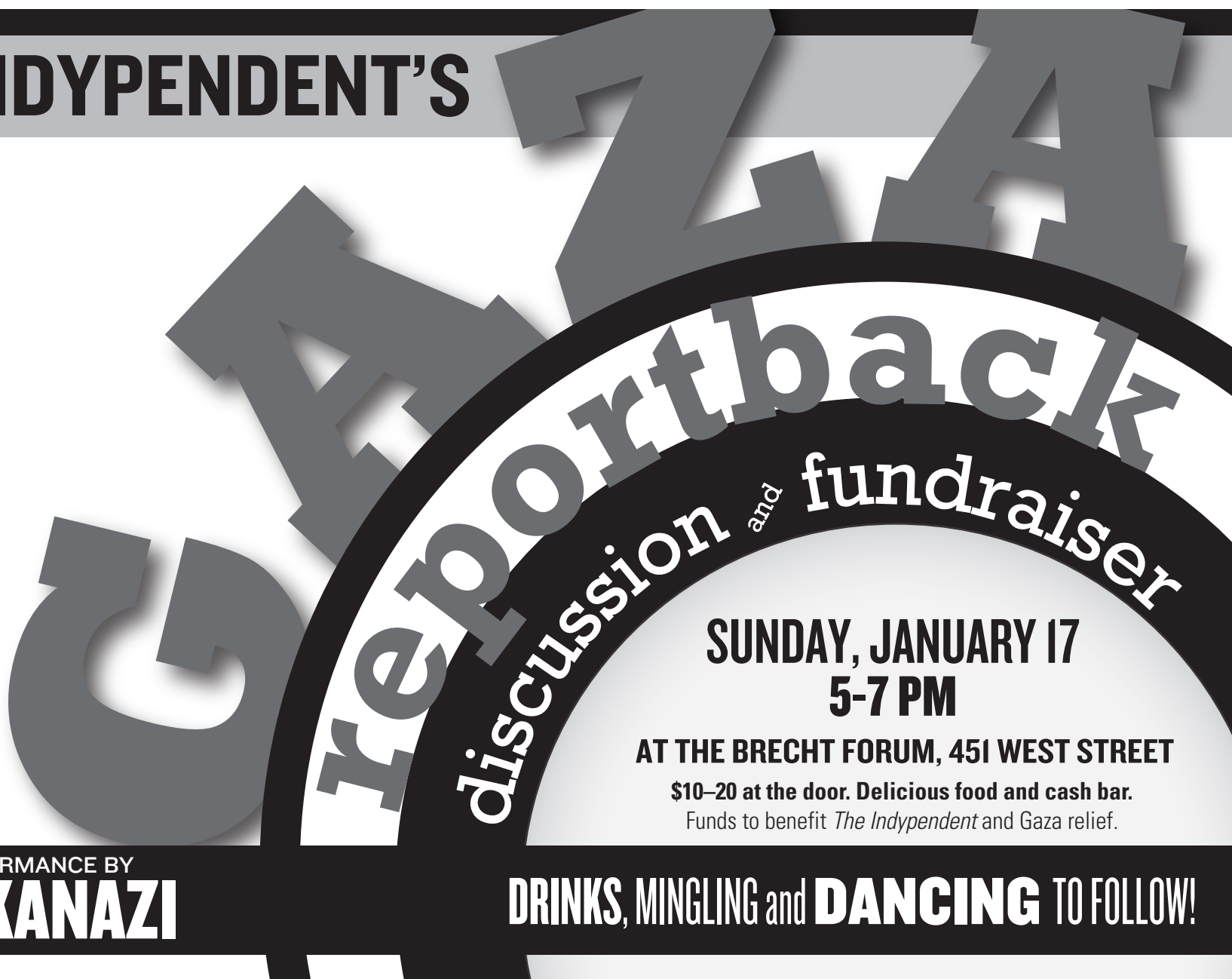
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Let’s Break from the Party of War and Wall Street

BY STANLEY ARONOWITZ

People cannot live without hope. The long night of the eight Bush years was tolerated only because many of us believed it would come to an end. That Obama seized on that belief better than his Democratic opponents is a testament to the high expectations people had that regime change in Washington just might bring about a better life. While Hillary Clinton, his main primary opponent, evoked the traditional symbols of military preparedness combined with liberal domestic policies, Obama steadfastly preached the gospel of peace and hope and carefully avoided making lavish promises. Clinton won the backing of most organized labor, women’s organizations and major Democratic politicians. But Obama, the only fresh face in the gallery of candidates, outmaneuvered the traditional party dons. With little support at the top, Obama went for the grassroots, correctly gauging the country to be fed up with the old ties and old ideas.

Obama had the advantage of being African-American, even though many black politicians had hopped on the Clinton bandwagon early in the campaign. But Obama’s not-so-secret weapon was his appeal among youth who, responding to his bold message of hope and change, came out of the woodwork by the thousands to volunteer in his campaign, trudging door to door in the cities and tipping the balance in states like Virginia, Pennsylvania and Ohio. They also delivered much of the West to the insurgent. What befuddled the pros and the pundits was Obama’s ability to mobilize youth who chronically stay away from the polls, largely because they see little point in voting. He seemed to have the power to make them believe in the system. Although the overall vote count was not remarkable compared to

past presidential elections, the proportion of voting youth and blacks helped give Obama a relatively easy victory over John McCain, the lapsed maverick.

For many who voted for Obama, 2009 has been a year of deep disillusionment. The degree to which the Obama administration revealed its basic war and big business orientation was first shown by his major cabinet and staff appointees. Robert Gates, Bush’s defense secretary, was retained; Hillary Clinton, perhaps the Senate’s leading hawk, became secretary of state; the crucial position of treasury secretary went to a Federal Reserve bureaucrat and Wall Street ally, Tim Geithner; and Lawrence Summers, Bill Clinton’s last Treasury head, became Obama’s chief economic advisor.

What was obscured by Obama’s rousing campaign and nimble rhetoric has become brutally apparent in the aftermath. The Democratic Party has, since the end of World War II, been the favored party of finance capital. That mantle once belonged to the Republicans — the fabled party of the rich and wealthy. But the GOP has sunk into a right-wing party of opposition and no longer pretends to be a party of government. Its cast, begun as far back as the Goldwater takeover in 1964, is anti-internationalist, narrowly ideological and administratively incompetent. Meanwhile, the Democrats live a glaring contradiction: on the one hand, they rely on labor and the new social movements of feminism, ecology and black freedom both for votes and for a large portion of their political cadres. On the other, they need hundreds of millions of dollars to oil the party apparatus and run 535 national election campaigns. Aside from the unions, most of this money comes from corporate sponsors and wealthy individuals.

This contradictory existence accounts for several important political realities: Despite

a large “progressive” congressional delegation, especially in the House of Representatives, the Democrats’ weight of governance falls on its debts to, and alliances with, leading financial corporations. For example, that the Democrats are forced to sponsor some version of healthcare “reform” cannot disguise the fact that the big insurance companies have called the tune on the legislation. Nor are the Democrats’ ostensible commitments to dealing with global warming as powerful as the influence of the energy giants who have systematically thwarted any attempt to address what may be the defining public issue of this century. And the Obama administration has handled the most profound economic crisis since the Great Depression by continuing the Bush policy of bailing out the banks and insurance companies and virtually ignoring rising joblessness, burgeoning foreclosures and deepening black and Latino poverty. In short, Obama is the perfect manifestation of the contradiction that rips across the Democratic Party bow.

Continued on page 10



WAITING FOR THE RAPTURE

BY NICHOLAS POWERS

Can it be a year ago that we celebrated Obama’s victory? I danced in Harlem where cars honked like a wild jazz band. A woman climbed on a hood and screamed. People flooded the streets of cities around the world as a great love surged through us and swallowed the planet whole. In the midst of celebration I raised my arms and yelled, “This is who we really are!”

A year later, why do we still have faith in him? We hoped Obama would give us a “Green New Deal.” Instead he poured an ocean of public money into Wall Street, tripled the number of U.S. troops in Afghanistan and let A.I.G. executives reap more than \$400 million in bonuses as Americans pitched tent cities and turned to food stamps. If John McCain had won and done any of this we’d be in the streets knocking down police barricades, but we won’t protest Obama.

Despite the evidence, we believe he’ll deliver us. Is this not the liberal version of faith-based politics?

The “we” here does not mean the left, wary as it is of electoral politics, but the millions of voters who saw in Obama a vehicle for their hope. The need to hope comes from our history. We are the result of European colonization and capitalist exploitation. We were raised to see brown skin as a metaphor of filth, and this inequality created a global reservoir of repressed desire. Obama’s historical victory was seen as the conduit through which this immense need for change could speak.

But the narrative-frames around his campaign betrayed us. A narrative-frame is the story that surrounds another story, and the story that surrounded his 2008 presidential election was that Obama is our liberal messiah. He was “The One” whom the people

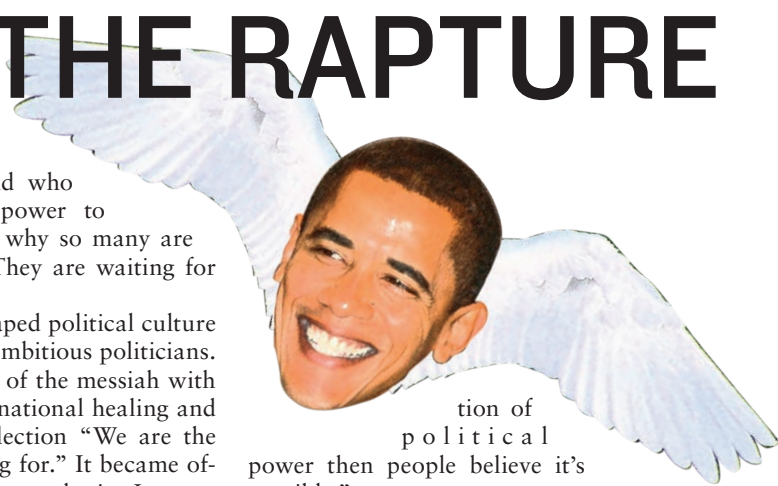
delivered to power and who in turn will deliver power to the people. And that’s why so many are blindly loyal to him. They are waiting for the Rapture.

Religion has long shaped political culture by providing roles for ambitious politicians. Obama played the role of the messiah with his soaring rhetoric of national healing and his slogan of divine election “We are the ones we’ve been waiting for.” It became official Democratic propaganda in January 2008 when Sen. Ted Kennedy, the Liberal Lion, put a rhetorical halo on the young senator’s head, “Every person he meets, every crowd he inspires, and everyone he touches generates new hope that our greatest days as a nation are still ahead.”

The messianic narrative was so overwhelming that McCain spoofed it in a campaign ad entitled, “The One.” It juxtaposed Obama’s heavenly rhetoric with clips of actor Charleston Heston as Moses parting the Red Sea. Obama joked about it at the October 2008 Alfred E. Smith roast, “I was not born in a manger. I was born on the planet Krypton and was sent here to save Earth.”

Against this backdrop, somber moments took on a religious glow. In February 2009 a black homeless woman named Henrietta Hughes begged Obama for help at a rally. He leaned over, kissed her on the cheek and told his staff to see to her. The video clip circulated on the internet like a miracle.

Popular culture also paved the way for Obama. Images of a black president have usually been a sign of progress. We see this figure in the 1972 film *The Man*, and more recently in *Deep Impact*, *Bruce Almighty*, *Head of State* and 2012. The Fox TV series 24 had two black presidents, about which lead actor Keifer Sutherland said, “If you show a population that it is possible to have African-American people in this kind of posi-



tion of political power then people believe it’s possible.”

Ultimately we believed Obama because he is black. He must have felt how power works, the fear, the suspicious glances, the bubble one is trapped in or the expectation to perform tired roles.

The danger with the messiah narrative is that the audience plays a passive role. Change comes to us, not from us. The power of the messiah is in direct relation to the suffering of the people; hence they have more value as victims than as political agents. We see this in the healthcare debate when MoveOn.org enlisted R.E.M. for a song. A melancholy guitar jangles in the video *We Can’t Afford to Wait* as grim people bloated with chemicals, with tubes in their throats or surgical scars on their chests hold signs with their conditions. They are victims waiting for political deliverance.

If for liberals Obama is the messiah, for the right he’s the Antichrist of the New World Order. The right uses the narrative-frame of “barbarians at the gate,” in which the people must defend their homes from nefarious outsiders. Whether Obama is Hitler, a Muslim Manchurian candidate or the Antichrist, the goal of this narrative is to transform anxiety into racist paranoia that sunders the polity into an absolute “us” and “them,” and to enlist the audience as defenders of God and civilization. During last year’s “Tea Parties,” angry whites marched with signs saying, “Obama’s Plan: White Slavery.”

Continued on page 10

HOPE HAS LEFT THE BUILDING

BY ARUN GUPTA

If one case encapsulates the disaster that is the Obama administration, it may be the dustup over the A.I.G. bonuses last March. Recall that extreme gambling by A.I.G. Financial Products nearly crashed the world in 2008, necessitating a taxpayer bailout of \$182.3 billion (and counting). Following this, A.I.G., now 80 percent government owned, rained more than \$400 million in bonuses on Financial Products employees for their performance in 2008. The Obama administration, which knew of the bonuses for months, played defense for A.I.G. by unspooling a bloated Larry Summers to argue, “The government cannot just abrogate contracts.”

The problem was the feds had just demanded that auto workers abrogate their hard-won contracts before Detroit got a bailout. United Auto Workers leaders complied, sacrificing “job security provisions and financing for retiree health care,” plus agreeing to cuts in base pay, overtime pay, break time, raises, skilled worker positions and chopping wages for many new hires in half to \$14 an hour.

Far from failures or mistakes, these episodes illustrate how Team Obama, which surfed a tsunami of corporate money and savvy branding to victory, is doing exactly what it was elected to do: redistribute money upwards. It’s hard to think of a decision by this White House that would have not elicited cackling glee from the Bush administration. The number of horrendous policies enacted by the Obama administration in barely a year boggles the imagination. What follows is by no means an exhaustive list, just a few dozen of the worst.

EMPIRE’S BACKYARD

Even *Time* magazine has concluded that “Obama’s Latin American Policy Looks Like Bush’s.” While many hoped Obama would lift the 48-year-old embargo against Cuba, Obama loosened a few restrictions only for Cuban Americans. Last April, Obama declared the United States a “full partner” in Mexico’s calamitous drug war. Months later, the White House slapped Bolivia with economic penalties, allegedly for not being an enthusiastic drug warrior, but more likely for pursuing an independent agenda. And there is the Honduran coup, which Obama endorsed by recognizing the rigged election in November. Most ominously, his administration inked a deal in October for seven military bases in Colombia, convenient for launching new wars against socialist governments in the region.

GREEN JOB LOSS

Before Van Jones was thrown under the bus, Obama promised to create five million green jobs in plug-in hybrids, weatherization, renewable energy, biofuels and clean coal. Biofuels and clean coal? Okay, maybe it’s a good thing this promise was snuffed. But as Naomi Klein points out, between the stimulus, the auto bailout and the Wall Street rescue, Obama had the leverage and political capital to fund mass transit and a smart electrical grid, restructure government-owned automakers to focus on green technology and force bailed out banks to fund industrial restructuring and green infrastructure. Instead, we get a White House vegetable garden the size of a New York apartment.

TOO BIG TO FAIL, TOO BIG TO JAIL

While the original Troubled Assets Relief Program was “only” \$700 billion, the program’s watchdog estimates taxpayer money at risk is a phenomenal \$23.7 trillion. The Obama administration has been more interested in defending obscene executive pay, blessing more of Wall Street’s high-risk trading, stonewalling on how the TARP funds were used and abused, and resisting real regulation, rather than prosecuting Goldman Sachs and other banks that peddled risky mortgage-backed securities while secretly betting they would plummet in value — a textbook case of securities fraud. But what do you expect from a candidate who raked in the most dough from Wall Street, real estate, commercial banks and hedge funds?

A DREAM FORECLOSED

In comparison to the bank bailout, relief for homeowners is limited to a miserly \$75 billion under Obama’s Making Home Affordable program. As of December, only 31,000 homeowners have received permanent mortgage modifications. The real winners are loan servicers. Of the top 25 participants, 21 were “heavily involved in the subprime lending industry.” The parent companies of the lenders, which have vacuumed up more than \$21 billion from the program, include Bank of America, Wells Fargo, JPMorgan Chase and Citigroup. Homeowners in the program who don’t get permanent help are left with wrecked credit scores while they continue to pay for homes they can’t afford, which may be lengthening the crisis. Meanwhile, the number of homeowners with mortgage debt greater than the value of their homes was 23 percent as of Sep-

tember and could peak at 48 percent in 2011. Even modest measures, such as allowing bankruptcy judges to lower mortgages, were abandoned by the Obama administration.

HEALTHCARE DEFORM

There is a method to Obama’s madness. First, his economic philosophy is to subsidize private entities to provide public goods. Second, his main tactic is to appeal to bipartisanship. (Never mind that there was plenty of bipartisanship during the Bush era when Democrats surrendered to virtually every heinous decision.) In the case of healthcare, a much simpler and more effective single-payer system was rejected because Republican support was supposedly needed. The bipartisan tactic allowed the Obama administration to replace single payer with a fake public option that was then dropped. As for the healthcare bill, it will skim \$500 billion from publicly funded

Medicare and Medicaid and use it to subsidize individuals who will be forced to buy for-profit insurance or pay a fine. The bill does nothing to control costs, ensure quality coverage or prevent workers from losing job-related insurance. It allows for wildly different rates based on age and region, and will deliver millions of new “customers” to insurance and drug companies and for-profit hospitals.

WAR IS THE HEALTH OF THE STATE

While President-elect, Obama was largely silent about the Israeli slaughter of 1,400 civilians in Gaza. Three days after being inaugurated, Obama ordered Predator drone strikes inside Pakistan, expanding the illegal U.S. war. Over the last year, Obama has committed another 64,000 soldiers to Afghanistan, effectively launching a new year. There are still 115,000 U.S. troops in Iraq. The use of private military contractors is surging, with 121,000 (and growing) in

Afghanistan alone. Obama has continued to threaten Iran over its uranium-enrichment program. And many believe the White House is “initiating a low-level war in Yemen.” Author and Ret. U.S. Army Col. Andrew Bacevich writes that Obama has effectively signed on to “perpetual war.”

LABOR PAINS

Despite reportedly pouring \$450 million into Obama’s campaign and providing thousands of volunteers, organized labor has been unable to advance its main cause: a bill called the Employee Free Choice Act that would make it easier for employees in a workplace to unionize. The Obama administration says it is committed to passing the bill, but it has not put any muscle behind it. That may be because wealthy Obama backers, including three Chicago billionaires who own hotels, vehemently oppose the bill.



BLUEPRINT FOR AGGRESSION: President Barack Obama speaks with Lt. Gen. Stanley A. McChrystal in the Oval Office in May 2009.
PHOTO: PETE SOUZA, FLICKR.COM/THEWHITEHOUSE

War Party

Continued from page 8

According to historical myth, Roosevelt saved U.S. capitalism during the Great Depression by instituting vast regulation of capital. In this tale, the so-called “second” New Deal of social reform was a reflection of the administration’s move to the left. What this version of history fails to note is that these reforms were preceded by a mass workers movement armed with the tools of direct action that, within a few short years, transformed the U.S. workplace. Roosevelt was both appalled and politically astute: from an open-throated voice of capital manifested chiefly in the National Industrial Recovery Act aimed at reviving capitalism by throttling wages, he forged an image of the Democrats as the party of the working people, the poor and the oppressed. That image was, to some degree, backed by concrete steps such as creating Social Security, but it did not take long before the Democrats, spurred by the imperatives of anti-communism and the Cold War, reverted to conservative policies. Except for the progressive legislation of the 1960s — the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts, Medicare and Medicaid — there have been no major social reforms since the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938.

As Obama has made plain, the Democrats have retained their character as the War Party. Apart from World War II, which was clearly a bipartisan effort, military interven-

tions in Korea, the Dominican Republic, Vietnam and Kosovo; the opening rounds of the Iraq war in the late 1990s; and the escalation of war in Afghanistan have been the products of the Democrats. Only the two Bush presidents proved equally committed to aggressive foreign military actions.

Meanwhile, as the economy continued to sink, the Obama administration, directed by Fed Chair Ben Bernanke, Summers and Geithner, transferred trillions in taxpayer funds to the leading institutions of the financial system. Another bundle went to General Motors and Chrysler, now free to chop jobs at will in order to save their corporations from liquidation. Even as official joblessness climbed to more than 10 percent — and nearly 16 percent among blacks — Obama’s emphasis was on “stabilizing” the financial system.

Early on in his presidency, Obama told the country his first major priority was to enact a universal healthcare program. Congress and healthcare movements accepted the challenge and prepared themselves for the long battle ahead. But Obama disappointed again. Instead of sending to Congress a single-payer proposal that would have eliminated the power of the insurance companies, he allowed conservatives and insurance company lobbyists to write much of the bills that passed both houses of Congress. The final version will not include even a watered-down public option, nor will it likely sanction the right of women to have coverage for abortions. Under the legisla-

tion, most Americans will be forced to buy private insurance and pay big pharma’s exorbitant prescription drug prices.

Obama is an ordinary, though talented, center-right president. While surrendering to the right, he has maintained a sizeable constituency among liberals and even some on the left. That a vigorous antiwar movement has not emerged to fight the war escalations and his betrayals, that there are no major protests against the phony health-care bill about to become law and, equally important, that we have seen no significant demonstrations for jobs and income testifies to the torpor that has overcome large sections of the U.S. people, including a portion of the left. Among the reasons for this apparent passivity is that we still labor under the illusion that the Democrats are, at least in part, the party of the people and have failed to recognize their vital role in perpetuating capitalist rule.

Are we so preoccupied with the myriad personal crises that afflict all subordinate social classes? Are we exhausted in the wake of the battering of the media, the flood of never-ending catastrophes, the defeats suffered by the popular forces? Are the progressive forces ready to occupy the political space of the opposition rather than the “left wing” of the possible that moves ceaselessly to the right? Events belie forecasts so, as America’s wont, the explosion is likely to come as an unexpected hurricane.

Perhaps the starting point would be the left’s clean break from the Democrats.

Rapture

Continued from page 9

It was a small indicator of the rise in militia group activity and race-based hate crimes.

As long as these two narratives exist, the political field can wobble left but will tilt right because the right offers people who are suffering a meaning to frame their pain. They say minorities or gays or foreigners or secular culture is the enemy, not the rich who stole their money. Until liberals join the left and offer both political vision and agency for the people, we will lose.

Obama wrote in *The Audacity of Hope*, “I serve as a blank screen on which people of vastly different political stripes project their own views.” We projected our desires on him and he became our mirror. It is a dynamic analyzed long ago by philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach, who wrote in *The Essence of Christianity*, “God is nothing else than man: he is, so to speak, the outward projection of man’s inward nature.”

Yet a single saving element should be extracted from faith in Obama. The glory we felt was not because of him, it was the incandescent reflection of ourselves we saw and loved. The euphoria of election night was evidence of the world within us. We are that powerful.

Instead of projecting our best selves outward we can focus on our actual lives. Weeks ago, I was at a store with a friend. She stacked her food on the counter and whipped out a food stamp card, paid and quickly put it in her purse. She stiffly walked ahead feeling how ashamed I was of her. When we sat down she said, “I didn’t want you to judge me.” I apologized too quickly and then put myself in her place. How scared she must be of the stigma pouring out of my eyes. How would I feel if I were ashamed to even buy food? I looked at her and apologized again and meant it. She leaned to me and said, “It’s okay.” She waited a moment and took out the food stamp card, “This is who we really are.”

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Michael Dorsey, Professor of Environmental Studies, Dartmouth College; Cecil Corbin-Mark, West Harlem Environmental Action; Brian Tokar, Institute for Social Ecology

TENTATIVE SPEAKERS:

Alexis Baden-Mayer, Organic Consumers Association, Joan Yang, Deputy Ambassador from Palau

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Materialism and the Human Capitalism
Slavery and the Civil War
Oil and Water
The Future of the Radical Left
The Crisis of Neoliberalism
Housing and Race in the Post-war US
Crisis and Political Organization
Class Structure in China and India
Money and Finance
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REVIEWS



BRIAN PONTO

The Death of Conservatism

By Sam Tanenhaus
Random House, 2009

*Republican Gomorrah: Inside the
Movement that Shattered the Party*

By Max Blumenthal
Nation Books, 2009

Deal's economic safety net and gave Republicans a vocabulary to negatively frame the social upheaval brought by the various civil rights movements in the 1960s and 1970s. In this context, Nixon's silent majority naturally viewed efforts by African-Americans, Latino workers, women and the LGBT community to challenge the status quo as a threat to the prevailing societal order.

Tanenhaus terms movement conservatism as "revanchist," an effort that seeks to reclaim the America that "has been taken away from its true owners...They have to conquer the territory that's been taken from them. Revanchism really comes from the French word for 'revenge.' It's a politics of vengeance," he recently explained on Bill Moyers *Journal*.

Blumenthal's book starts off where Tanenhaus' ends — the Christian right is in full command of a party of mostly white Christians who are geographically isolated in the South and parts of the West and, in Pavlovian response to right-wing talk radio and Fox News' politics of fear, deeply antagonistic towards immigrants, feminists and the LGBT community.

Republican Gomorrah is chock-full of revanchist characters — from Sarah Palin's "real America" to James Dobson, founder of the Christian conservative juggernaut Focus on the Family. According to Blumenthal, the "culture of personal crisis" that feeds so much of Dobson's brand of politics could implode the Republican party.

Blumenthal argues that the purest of evangelical Christian political narratives start with some fall from grace followed by redemption and the acceptance of Jesus Christ. Former President George W. Bush's narrative blends seamlessly into this culture of personal crisis — the drunkard makes good with God and receives the presidency as his reward.

Republican Gomorrah's strength is found in chapters detailing the intersection of big money and conservative politics. Blumenthal, a fellow at The Nation Institute and Media Matters for America, seems to think that the Christian right and big business coalition cannot remain in control because of the Christian right's propensity to implode and alienate. *The Death of Conservatism* states "the war of ideology was also a war of class" but oddly does not go into detail.

While the birthers, tea baggers and town hall hell-raisers may be the Republican Party's latest attempt at non-evangelical reactionary politics, there will certainly be more culture wars around the corner.

—BENNETT BAUMER

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The Old, New Right

Watching Obama's inauguration almost a year ago on TV, I remember feeling gleeful at the sight of George and Laura Bush taking off in a helicopter as the Obamas and Bidens waved goodbye. After eight years of war, lies and looting of the economy, many progressives saw the entire Republican Party boarding that helicopter along with the Bushes. Yet, one year later, conservative politics have not withered and died as many of the liberals who rallied around Obama had predicted.

Republicans, for now, are hanging around, and two books, Max Blumenthal's *Republican Gomorrah* and Sam Tanenhaus' *The Death of Conservatism*, address the rise and fall of the right's dominance in the United States.

Both authors agree that the Christian right's stranglehold over Republican politics is destroying the party. For Tanenhaus, the editor of *The New York Times Book Review* as well as the newspaper's Week in Review section, the current relationship between the religious right and conservatives is a direct result of the party's reaction to the New Deal. Conservatives thundered against Roosevelt's move for a stronger state role in the economy and branded his modest social programs as "socialism," ignoring the fact that Roosevelt was from an oligarchic family.

What both books miss is that

the Christian right's control over the Republican party has withered and been currently displaced with a brand of right-wing economic populism that is largely absent of any religiosity and is marked by opposition to taxes, anti-big-government rhetoric and those unhinged town hall participants ranting "get your government hands off my Medicare." The cause of this shift is twofold — the ruling elite that actually controls the Republican Party sense that the Christian right is played out and that it can act (often irrationally) in a way that threatens core Republican bourgeois class interests. The birthers, tea baggers and town hall hell-raisers are a neurotic offshoot of the right's bigotry, xenophobia and distaste for the first African-American president.

The Death of Conservatism is essentially a brief history of the Republican right's modern ascendancy. The explosion of industrial unionism and active leftist parties in the 1930s and 1940s produced an extreme counter-reaction and the right's biggest "win" of the era — the McCarthy-inspired red scares. Tanenhaus is clearly an admirer (and soon a biographer) of conservative powerhouse William Buckley, Jr., who got his start as one of McCarthy's "exuberant intellectual champions." Buckley laid the foundation for the right's decades long erosion of the New

Artists Reclaim Public Space

A CONVERSATION WITH PUBLIC AD CAMPAIGN FOUNDER JORDAN SEILER

BY DANNY VALDES

Everywhere you turn in New York City, there are advertisements—posters featuring attractive models schilling perfume, pop bands promoting their latest albums and celebrities endorsing soft drinks. The Public Ad Campaign, a collective of street artists, sees the prevalence of these advertisements as an intrusion into public space. Founded by Jordan Seiler in 2000, this group is dedicated to reclaiming the city's sidewalks, subways and street corners by creating unauthorized public art installations. The group's latest undertaking, an ongoing project called National Bestseller, incorporates bestselling or popular books that are taken apart and then wheat-pasted into a single

DANNY VALDES: *Is there a difference between the way art and advertising affect us in public space?*

JORDAN SEILER: The difference between outdoor advertising and art is the difference between a dialogue and a monologue. So you may look at images on an advertisement and find them to be very stunning. They may attract your attention. But the intention is not to have a conversation with you—it's to impart you with a certain piece of knowledge. Marketing and advertising have gotten very good at creating imagery and ideas that are very quickly absorbed and don't require any attention to come back to them. But with artwork in general, and specifically with the kind of work we do at the

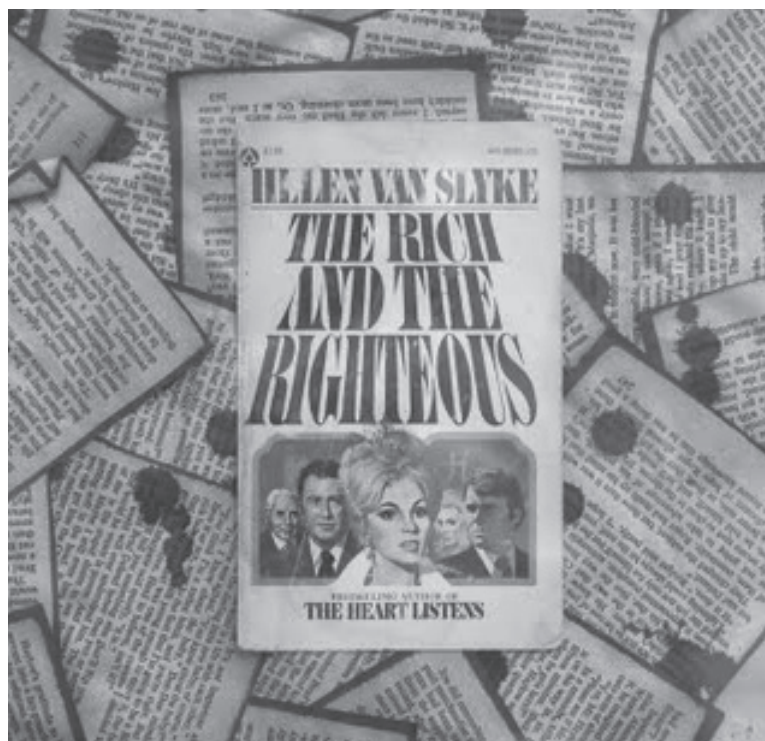


supremacy in the public environment. We take it for granted that advertisements should be there. I do my work over legally posted advertisements to bring home the point, but one of the ways we've been able to rally people around the cause is by specifically targeting illegal outdoor ads. NPA / City Outdoor is one of our main targets because they're street-level wild-posters. They operate on construction sheds and framed spaces outdoors—anywhere they can put paper onto.

DV: *In 2007, the City of São Paulo became the biggest city in the world to pass a ban on outdoor advertising. Would you like to see something similar happen in New York City? What would be the benefits of an ad-free city?*

JS: We'd love to see that happen in New York City. It's a long way off but that's what we're fighting for—a public that makes that decision and asks its representatives to enact some sort of law of that magnitude. One of the things I think we've seen in São Paulo since this happened is an increase in people using the public environment in a way that they find beneficial for themselves. There's been a huge increase in street murals and artwork. People are getting out there and altering the physical environment. This creates a psychological connection between the public individual and the space he or she is occupying. The idea is that you make a drawing on the wall and then you become that drawing. When you leave it behind you leave a little bit of yourself along with it, and because you've left a little bit of yourself at that spot you then take care of it, and by wanting to take care of that specific location you want to take care of the community that space is in. We feel like it's everyone's responsibility to protect public space, and we are trying to reconnect the public individual and public space.

For more information about the Public Ad Campaign in New York City, visit publicadcampaign.com.



CULTURE JAMMING: NYC-based Public Ad Campaign transforms popular books into art and pastes them over advertisements. PHOTO: JORDAN SEILER

sheet and installed over advertisements in phone booths.

Seiler, 31, a native New Yorker born in the Chelsea Hotel, started the Public Ad Campaign shortly after returning to New York City as a graduate from the Rhode Island School of Design. What started as a personal art project soon grew into much more of an activist-oriented effort against public advertising. As Seiler explains, the group's mission is not to wreak havoc, but to defend the first amendment. "Public spaces are really our last democratic spaces. They are the only spaces that we have left as a society in which we all have an equal voice and can have open dialogue."

The Independent's Danny Valdes spoke with Seiler about the different ways people interact with public space and corporate advertising's threat to the urban environment in New York City and beyond.

Public Ad Campaign, the intention is to only create dialogue; to create a moment of questioning, to create a moment of serendipity where the viewer becomes engaged in the space and they start to see their environment, themselves, the person standing next to them differently than they did before.

DV: *While some people may question the legality of your work, many of the ads around the city that you cover with your installations are actually posted illegally by promotion companies, most notably NPA/City Outdoor. Does the Public Ad Campaign specifically target ads that are posted illegally?*

JS: The Public Ad Campaign as a group doesn't specifically target legal or illegal ads. We are against the commercialization of public space in general. I think one of the things that people don't think about these days is advertising's

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Founded in 1979, The Peoples' Voice Cafe has its roots in a time-honored tradition combining culture with political activity.



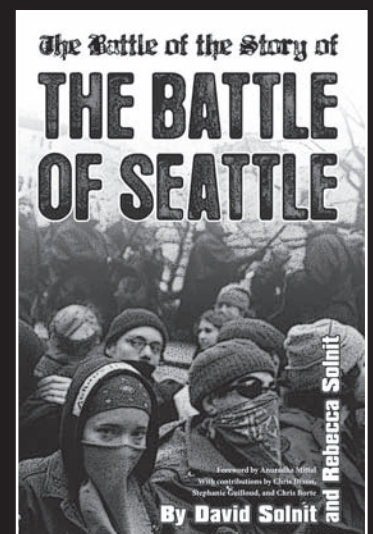
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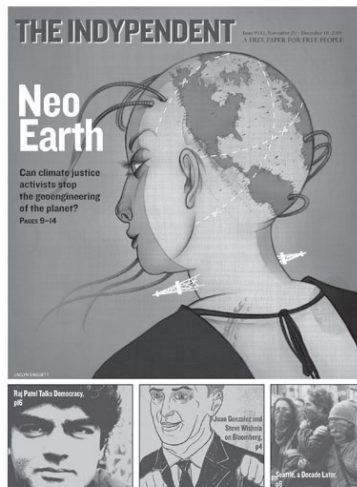
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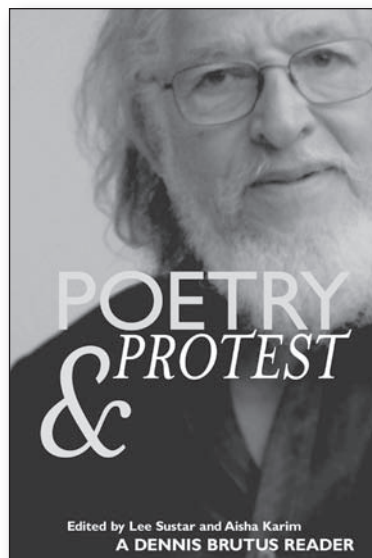
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POETRY & PROTEST: A DENNIS BRUTUS READER

Edited by Lee Sustar
and Aisha Karim, \$16

This vital original collection of interviews, poetry, and essays of the much-loved anti-apartheid leader is the first book of its kind to bring together the full, forceful range of his work.

Brutus, imprisoned along with Nelson Mandela, was known worldwide for his unparalleled eloquence as an opponent of the apartheid South African regime. Long after its fall, he was a voice for global justice and humanity, speaking and writing extensively on issues of debt, poverty, war, racism, and neoliberalism.

Memorial for Dennis Brutus (1924-2009)

Please join us for a memorial service to honor the life and legacy of Dennis Brutus.

Sunday January 17, 2 pm at The Brecht Forum,
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REVIEWS

All Things Considered: CLIMATE CHANGE FROM DIFFERENT ANGLES

*Whole Earth Discipline:
An Ecopragmatist Manifesto*
By Stewart Brand
Viking, 2009

Now that more people are attuned to the ticking clock of climate change, there is no shortage of theories for how the next act will play out. Though scientists, activists and theorists have been wildly off the mark so far, they continue to guess at what will be the solutions — and pitfalls — for getting the planet back on track.

Stewart Brand first made his mark not by imagining the future, but by making it happen. His *Whole Earth Catalog* of 1968 (published through the early 1970s), changed publishing, kick-started the computer revolution, the green movement, organic farming and the whole concept of living off the grid.

His signature scattershot style — he served as the *Catalog's* editor — brought together open-ended possibilities: In a single place one could learn about abandoned railroads, barn building, integrated circuits, the illusion of money and several thousand other things one had never heard of. It was subtitled *Access to Tools*. It would not be a stretch to say it laid the groundwork for the internet.

In his new book, *Whole Earth Discipline*, Brand intends to serve, if not the same smorgasbord, then at least a little something in the same style. He is quick to throw ideas around: don't worry about polar bears, let them interbreed with grizzlies; slums empower women and slow population growth; no agricultural product has been "natural" for 10,000 years; coal has killed more people than radiation. Like Al Gore, he's certain that if we don't do anything, we're toast. There's plenty of counterintuitive things actually worth trying. He introduces the reader to dozens of scientists who support, and sometimes oppose, his ideas.

What's his prescription? Embrace nuclear power, genetic modification and geoengineering and stop trying to solve the imaginary problem of what might happen. (Anyone re-



PAT AULISIO

member Y2K? He admits he was wrong about that.) Brand considers Yucca Mountain to be the "classic example of the folly of long-term planning" — why should we expect that nuclear waste disposal must remain intact for 10,000 years? It's more likely that we will dig up buried waste to use as fuel long before it leaks out; or it's just as likely we'll be reduced to a new stone age, and then radiation will be the least of our problems.

As for genetic modification, he quotes Bertolt Brecht: "Grub first, then ethics." Brand makes the unsettling accusation that Greenpeace's opposition to genetically modified food has condemned mil-

lion member Y2K? He admits he was wrong about that.) Brand considers Yucca Mountain to be the "classic example of the folly of long-term planning" — why should we expect that nuclear waste disposal must remain intact for 10,000 years? It's more likely that we will dig up buried waste to use as fuel long before it leaks out; or it's just as likely we'll be reduced to a new stone age, and then radiation will be the least of our problems.

On the other hand: mirrors in space? Why not? A 1991 volcano sent enough sulphur into the upper atmosphere to cool the planet by half a degree; enough to account, maybe, for a slightly higher birth-rate of polar bears in 1992. Is it crazy to send more sulphur up there? Not as crazy as burning a few thousand gallons of jet fuel, well-proven

Stewart Brand wants us to embrace nuclear power, genetic modification and geoengineering and stop trying to solve the imaginary problem of what might happen.

lions to death by starvation. From an African point of view, a European ban on genetic modification gives Europe an economic advantage at Africa's peril.

With this approach, it is difficult to say Brand is wrong about any one thing, since he often changes the subject from one paragraph to the next. His cavalier suggestion that no state would risk handing nuclear weapons over to stateless terrorists for fear of retaliation doesn't sound like a safe bet to me, imaginary problem or not. Despite Brand's attempts at persuasion, making the leap from (to paraphrase Brand) "lots of what we worry about has already been solved" to "technology can fix any problem" is not a compromise I am always willing to make.

to have the opposite effect, on your next summer vacation.

On balance, *Whole Earth Discipline* is essential reading—Brand refuses to give us easy answers, but positions himself, correctly, I believe, at the core of the scientific method: restless, optimistic and never fully resolved.

—STEVEN ARNERICH

Stubborn Hope

BY PATRICK BOND

World-renowned political organizer and one of Africa’s most celebrated poets, Dennis Brutus, died Dec. 26 in Cape Town, in his sleep, aged 85. Brutus was born in Harare (the current capital of Zimbabwe) in 1924, but his South African parents soon moved to Port Elizabeth.


Subsequently forced into exile, in the Johannesburg Fort Prison cell that once housed Mahatma Gandhi. Brutus was transferred to Robben Island where he was jailed in the cell next to Nelson Mandela, and in 1964-65 wrote the collections *Sirens Knuckles Boots* and *Letters to Martha*, two of the richest poetic expressions of political incarceration.

justice movements as a leading strategist until his death, calling for the ‘Seattling’ of the recent Copenhagen summit because sufficient greenhouse gas emissions cuts and North-South ‘climate debt’ payments were not on the agenda. Among his many awards were eight honorary doctorates and the Lifetime Achievement Award of the South African government De-

An excerpt from “Examining Shaky Foundations” by Dennis Brutus

There is no way to build a truthful narrative if you begin your tale with a tissue of lies: fabrications, deceptions, contrivances striving to preserve old inequities striving only to secure your share of those same inequities under a gloss of iconic virtues and integrities carefully nurtured to complaisant media complaisant handmaidens of their corporate lords

April 3, 2009, Durban



DENNIS BRUTUS. PHOTO: WWW.CCA.UKZN.AC.ZA

He entered Fort Hare University on a full scholarship in 1940. After graduating with distinction, he studied law at the University of the Witwatersrand, but this was cut short by imprisonment for anti-apartheid activism. Brutus’ political activity initially included journalism, organizing with teachers and leading the new South African Sports Association as an alternative to white sports leagues. After his freedom of movement and right to publish was restricted in 1961 under the Suppression of Communism Act, he fled to Mozambique but was captured and deported to Johannesburg. There, in 1963, Brutus was shot in the back while attempting to escape police custody and nearly died while awaiting an ambulance reserved for blacks. While recovering, he was held

Brutus resumed careers as a poet and anti-apartheid campaigner in London, and was instrumental in achieving the apartheid regime’s expulsion in 1970 from the Olympic movement. Upon moving to the United States in 1977, Brutus served as a professor of literature and African studies at Northwestern (Chicago) and Pittsburgh, and defeated high-profile efforts by the Reagan Administration to deport him. He wrote numerous poems and helped organize major African writers’ organizations with colleagues Wole Soyinka and Chinua Achebe. Following the political transition in South Africa, Brutus resumed activities with grassroots social movements in his home country. He continued to serve in the global anti-racism, reparations and economic

partment of Arts and Culture. Uniquely courageous, consistent and principled, Brutus bridged the global and local, politics and culture, class and race, the old and the young, the red and green. He was an emblem of solidarity with all those peoples and environments wrecked by the power of capital and state elites. Given his role as a world-class poet, Brutus showed that social justice advocates can have both bread and roses. He is survived by his wife May, his sisters Helen and Dolly, eight children, nine grandchildren and four great-grandchildren. A memorial service will be held at the Brecht Forum Jan. 17 at 2 p.m. For more information, visit brechtforum.org.

Activist Café Celebrates Thirty Years

BY CHRIS SEYMOUR

How would you celebrate 30 years of presenting politics with a musical beat? Well, Peoples’ Voice Café has the answer — host a concert with the New York Society for Ethical Culture (NYSEC) featuring multicultural lesbian and gay gospel choir Lavender Light and roots-rock duo emma’s revolution. The concert, which is organized by the People’s Music Network, a group of activist musicians who helped birth the Peoples’ Voice Café back in 1979, will take place Jan. 29. Lavender Light fires up audiences with songs in the black gospel tradition ranging from old-time gospel favorites to spirituals and revamped pop anthems. The ensemble, whose high-energy performances have been getting audiences out of their seats since 1985, is the first non-church-affiliated lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender gospel choir



GET OUT OF YOUR SEAT: Lavender Light’s Artistic Director Ray Gordon and the rest of the choir at a December 2007 performance. PHOTO: B. PROUD/HRC

in the world. emma’s revolution — musical and life partners Pat Humphries and Sandy O — travel the country and the world singing to energize activists and mobilize the politically inactive. The concert will also feature music from artists representing the

diverse traditions of the People’s Music Network, from Nueva Cancion and street poetry to topical songwriting and storytelling. The concert will be held Jan., 29, 7:30 p.m. at the NYSEC. For more information, go to nysec.org.



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READING/DISCUSSION: *EARTHLY PLENTITUDES*. Bruno Gulli tackles the problematization and denials by theorists regarding labor and sovereignty. Please join Gulli for a discussion of his book, including notions of contingent labor, the social construction of disability and the work of caregiving.

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READING/DISCUSSION: *GIRLDRIVE*. Nona Willis Aronowitz and Emma Bee Bernstein ask women what they care about in their new book, *Girldrive: Criss-Crossing America, Redefining Feminism*, a photo documentary of an inspiring and unique road trip investigating the hearts and minds of young women across American. Aronowitz will read from and lead a discussion about the book.

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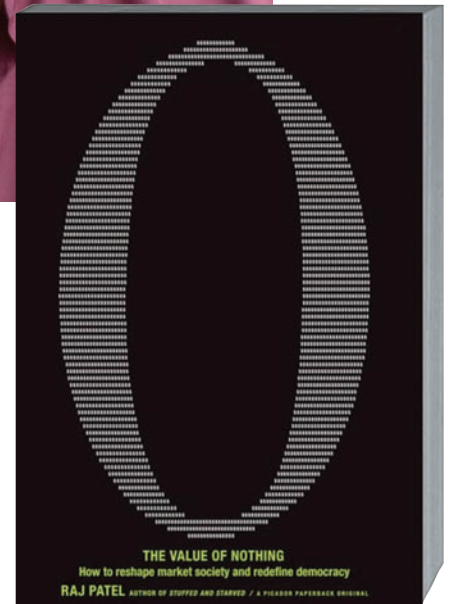
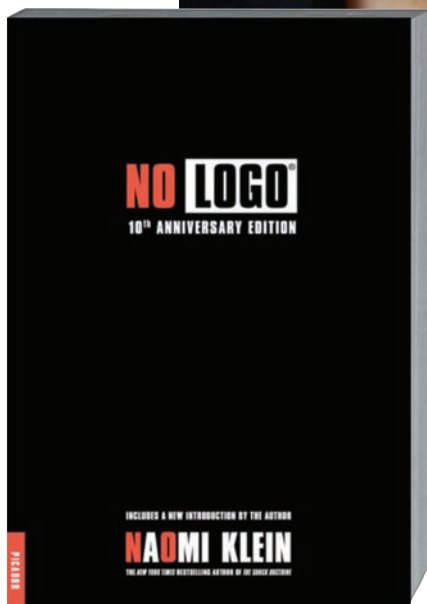
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